



News Release

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Utah Named 5th Healthiest State

Lowest Smoking and Cancer Death Rates, Obesity Still on the Rise

(SALT LAKE CITY) — Utah's low smoking, heart disease and cancer death rates contributed to the state's 5th place finish in the United Health Foundation's (UHF) 19th annual *America's Health Rankings*TM report. That's up from 6th place in 2007.

"The UHF report is an important tool that helps us evaluate our progress in many areas of health care," said Dr. David Sundwall, Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Executive Director. "While it puts the spotlight on our state's strengths, more importantly it shows us where we need to improve."

Utah's obesity rate increased over the past year; however the state's obesity ranking actually improved slightly during the same timeframe. In the past five years, the state's obesity rate has increased by 28 percent.

"Obesity is a significant threat to the health of an individual and to the health of our entire community," Sundwall said. "Earlier this year the state received a grant from the CDC to help fight the obesity epidemic, and I look forward to ensuring those funds are used to help reduce the obesity rate in our state."

Utah faces a critical shortage of primary care physicians—ranking 45th in the nation—and saw a drop in child immunization rates over the past year, two challenges officials at the UDOH place high on their priority lists.

"Some Utahns still believe we don't have a problem with diseases like measles and whooping cough, which are preventable by vaccinating our children," said Sundwall. "But the fact is, every year we have cases of vaccine-preventable illnesses and children do suffer. So we never let up in our efforts to educate parents about the benefits of immunizations."

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The report shows a drop in the number of deaths from heart disease and cancer and a slight improvement in health insurance coverage.

The UHF report praises Utah for its efforts in combating infectious diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis, low binge drinking rate and 2nd place showing in preventable hospitalizations, which indicates how well Medicare clients are able to get treatment for ailments without being hospitalized.

Utah ranks in the top 10 in 14 of the 22 determinants, including;

Prevalence of smoking	1 st (no change from 2007)
Cancer deaths	1 st (no change)
Preventable hospitalizations	2 nd (no change)
Cardiovascular deaths	3 rd (up from 5 th)
Prevalence of binge drinking	3 rd (down from 1st)
Infant mortality	4 th (down from 2nd)
Poor physical health	4 th (up from 17 th)
Infectious diseases	5 th (up from 10 th)
Premature death	6 th (up from 13 th)
Prevalence of obesity	7 th (up from 8 th)
Violent crime	7 th (down from 6 th)
Poor mental health	8 th (up from 18 th)
Children in poverty	9 th (up from 11 th)
High school graduation	9 th (no change)

There are many factors at work in Utah's consistent top 10 ranking over the 19 years of the UHF report. "The rankings document much of the valuable work done in public health," said Sundwall. "And we acknowledge the other significant factors that contribute to good health, including a culture that promotes healthy behaviors, and our nationally-recognized, high quality private health care systems."

For a full copy of the United Health Foundation—America's Health Rankings™ Report, visit www.americashealthrankings.org or www.unitedhealthfoundation.org.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.